Development Issue as Applied in Latin America: Teaching Towards Multicultural Understandings

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ABSTRACT
Three goals are central to my courses on Latin American development. These include developing non-advanced economy understandings of development concepts and processes, examining the implications of different world views for theory and policy and identifying the contributions that geography can make to better understanding development issues. Integral to these efforts is the message that geography combines systematic expertise with place knowledge and that combinations of these are essential to understanding how processes play out in places. These ideas are developed through consideration of course content at undergraduate and graduate levels and through a brief review of teaching resources and techniques. In each section, the paper emphasizes the importance of building an appreciation of difference in Latin American geography.

This paper presents goals and approaches to teaching contemporary development in Latin America. My courses are built around two central elements. The first familiarizes students with the content of development models and the politico-historical content of development thought. The second dimension sensitizes students to place to place variations in political, social and economic systems and in Latin American culture and history. Students learn that development conditions found in particular Latin American nations are shaped both by their positions within international political and economic systems as well as by unique combinations of cultural, political and economic characteristics and processes in places. Finally, students learn that multiple perspectives on development exist and that it is not a normative or unproblematic term. Rather, they must negotiate their own understandings of development based on some synthesis of North American and Latin American knowledge.

There have been a number of exciting initiatives in the teaching of geography throughout the eighties. These have included activities by the AAG and NCGE, articles in leading journals (Harper 1985; Downs et al. 1988; Hill 1989) and even the establishment of a new journal, *Contemporary Issues in Geographic Education*. In teaching Latin American development I am guided by several of the aims expressed in this new journal. These include: 1) explicit examination of the ideological content of development thought in relation to its political context; 2) an intent to develop multi-cultural, non-racist, non-sexist education; and 3) to foster understandings through education that are relevant to the present and future lives of ordinary people and the communities in which they live (*Contemporary Issues in Geography and Education* 1988: 102-103).

Following from this broad philosophical context, three goals are central to my courses on Latin American economic and social development.[(1)] The first involves building multi-cultural understandings of development concepts and processes. Latin American perspectives and concepts are introduced using academic writings, popular culture (movies, newspapers, literature) and learning about the everyday experiences of people (through guest speakers). The second goal derives from the first and stresses the diverse operation and impacts of development processes *in places*. Specifically, we learn that the effectiveness of development policy and the relevance of development theory is shaped by Latin American historical, cultural, political and social conditions. Elaborating the latter, we learn that the gender, ethnicity and social class composition of particular places dramatically affects development outcomes. The third goal involves identifying the contributions that geography makes to better understanding development issues and processes. Integral to these efforts is the message that geography combines **[end p. 295]** systematic expertise with place knowledge and that *combinations* of these are essential to understanding how processes play out *in places*. Closely related to this, we focus on the geographic scales at which different processes operate and demonstrate that

development studies must *integrate* international, national and local scales. For example, understanding the low-income housing crisis in Latin American cities requires analysis of the international debt crisis, its impacts on state fiscal resources and the changing relations between particular government agencies and urban social groups.

In the spirit of the "Teaching Latin America" session, this account presents my solutions to the challenges of teaching development in Latin America. This is not intended as all-encompassing or superior to other approaches but rather is a personal account. The "Teaching Latin America" session brought together scholars who teach very different dimensions of Latin American reality. In contrast to several of the other papers that present regional and cultural geographic approaches to the region, this account deals with the challenge of teaching development as practiced and as manifested in Latin America. Accordingly, my courses focus on understanding economic, social and political processes of development, operating at a variety of geographic scales, and on how these combine to create particular development landscapes in different places.

These ideas are illustrated here in two sections. The first discusses course goals and materials employed to achieve them. The second section complements this with a brief review of techniques at undergraduate and graduate levels which have met with some success in achieving course objectives.

TEACHING CONTEMPORARY LATIN AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT

As noted in the preceding section, my courses on Latin America fit within the context of development studies and are not regional, survey courses. Thus, a central goal is to build an appreciation of the intellectual history of "development" as a concept and a practice. In so doing, students learn that "development" concerns dynamic economic, social and political processes rather than some normative end state.

This is accomplished through the combination of two broad dimensions in my courses on Latin American development. The first provides students with an understanding of the content of development models and the historico-political context of development thought. This component of the course teaches both the value and the limitations of systematic, theoretical analysis. Specifically, theoretical analysis guides students in identifying processes and posits the nature of their operation, but has the danger of legitimizing rhetoric and/or privileging particular political agendas or geographical scales of analysis (Brown 1988). The second dimension presents students with a sense of the Latin American region: its history, culture, political and economic systems. In this component, students learn that the operation of broader processes is nuanced and place-specific and that local characteristics mediate and structure development outcomes.

TEACHING DEVELOPMENT THEORY

Students learn contrasting development perspectives including the modernization school and dependency approaches. For each, we consider their historical and regional origins, examples of models and processes that they emphasize and the objectives they espouse, related to their specific political context. Thus, as one example of modernization approaches, we examine Rostow's (1969) *Stages of Economic Growth*. We note the post World War II, cold war context in which it emerged, its North American origins and agenda vis-a-vis the developing world, the processes of diffusion and trickle-down it espoused and the types of interventions/policies it justified (Browett 1980).

The dependency literature, by contrast, provides a very different window on development processes and agendas (Dos Santos 1970; Cardoso and Faletto 1979). Originating in Latin America, this perspective provides very different interpretations of the same empirical reality and thus presents a critique of modernization theory. More specifically, the *dependistas* argue that rather than becoming more developed under existing politico-economic relationships and interventions, the opposite is occurring. Latin America,

they suggest, is placed in an increasingly disadvantaged position within the international system through economic arrangements that benefit elite minorities in Latin America and corporate and political leaders in the advanced economies (Evans 1979; Gereffi and Newfarmer 1985; Haggard 1989). In so doing, the dependency literature provides students with a very different picture of pressing issues and of crucial political and social dynamics that are shaping the region.

The introduction of dependency writings provides students with a basis for critiquing modernization perspectives and for learning to contrast advanced-economy (neo-colonialist) economic and political agendas with**[end p. 296]** those of the Latin Americans themselves. Thus, for example, these Latin American writers argue that the emphasis in modernization theory and policy rests on securing Latin American economies as suppliers of raw materials, as markets and as sites for cheap investment in periods of international capital surplus. Beyond this critique, the Latin Americans make two crucial points. First, that the development trajectories of Latin American countries are inevitably conditioned by their position in the international system. Second, that development agendas cannot be set from outside the region, but rather that the issues and problems of relevance will depend on place-specific characteristics and dynamics.

Thus through the substance of these development perspectives, students learn that the position of Latin American nations within the international system conditions the economic and political options available to them. The debt crisis provides an all too graphic illustration of this interconnectedness between Latin American societies and the international system. Peru's experiences under Garcia pointed up the inability for Latin America to isolate itself effectively from its broader context. In refusing to pay more than 10 percent of GNP annually towards the debt, Garcia was initially a hero (Lowenthal 1988; Bromley 1990). As time went on, however, Peru's inability to borrow additional funds or to entice foreign investment was directly linked to this isolationist position (Wilson 1987). Now, at the beginning of the Fujimori presidency, Peru faces dire economic and social conditions including food riots and extreme unemployment (Bromley, Personal communication 1990).

The need for development agendas to be set *within* regions is made even more explicit in writings on nonethnocentric development theory by Howard Wiarda (1983) and on anti-development struggles by Arturo Escobar (1988), Gustavo Esteva (1987), and O. Fals Borda (1986). These writings focus on local culture and knowledge, grassroots movements and the issues raised by these groups. Thus, they present an alternative to international development concepts and priorities, one that emanates from those social groups conventionally excluded from the development discourse, the urban poor, women, youth, minorities and peasants. As the quarter progresses, the students are introduced to these ideas in order to gain *both* a better sense of what development has meant for North Americans and the multiple meanings it takes on in different Latin American countries. Through these writings, students are moved away from paradigmatic and ethnocentric thinking about development and towards a focus on issues identified within the region. The latter derives from the students' growing appreciation that development is not a uniform process characterized by a common set of problems and challenges in all places. Rather, the concerns of development are place-specific and may center on employment contraction under debt crisis, crises of social reproduction in particular cities, famine, access to agricultural land, environmental degradation and so on.

Through consideration of these theoretical debates students learn to think systematically and critically about economic, demographic and political processes that help to explain regional structures and characteristics. Further, students learn that the conditions found in particular Latin American nations are shaped in part by their positions within international political and economic systems as well as by unique combinations of cultural, social, political and economic characteristics in places. Finally, students learn that multiple perspectives on development exist, that it is not a normative or unproblematic term and that they must negotiate their own understandings of it based on some synthesis of North American and Latin American knowledge. Thus one message of my courses is that theoretical approaches are useful in that they clarify the

types of political, social and economic processes and agendas that are operating in the region. However, coupled with this message is an emphasis on critique of grand theory, rhetorical and/or paradigmatic positions and an emphasis on the recognition that the operation of these processes is nuanced and place-specific. Accordingly, the second key dimension of my courses teaches students about Latin America as place, as a context within which processes play out in a variety of unpredictable ways.

LATIN AMERICA AS REGIONAL CONTEXT

As noted in the introduction, a central goal of my courses is to provide multi-cultural understandings of Latin American development. In part this is achieved through explicit attention to the different voices (advanced-economies' versus Latin American) in the development literature just discussed. In addition, multi-cultural understandings are achieved through examining the ways in which economic, social and political development processes interact **[end p. 297]**

with the diverse historical, cultural and ideological forces manifest in particular places.[(2)]

In addition, understanding the differential operation of development processes across places entails analysis of the gender, ethnicity and social class composition of places and of the ways in which these interact with systematic forces (Lawson and Staeheli 1990; Brown 1990).

Accordingly, in my courses *combinations* of systematic expertise and place knowledge are essential to understanding how processes play out in Latin America. The latter emphasis on place knowledge parallels calls by Latin Americans (see Fals Borda 1986; Esteva 1987) for more attention to the local as essential for understanding more global issues. There is a growing realization, for example, in writings on new social movements, that the struggles of local peoples provide important clues for understanding global processes. Some suggest that as social movements begin to coalesce in regions, new power structures may begin to emerge, structures that can only be understood via bottom-up analysis (Escobar 1988; Zimmerer 1990).

Thus, understandings of Latin American economic and social reality are derived through analyses of processes and actors operating at various geographical scales: local, regional, national and international. This is illustrated in class through selection of key issues that are prioritized within the region, such as the structure of economic investment, expansion of informal employment, social welfare provision and women's changing roles. The global, national, regional, and local forces shaping such issues are worked out by the students, using country, region and/or city specific sources and data. Through such exercises, students learn of broad themes relevant to the region at large and also learn how the particular place being analyzed mediates the operation of such forces. Two examples of this approach are provided below.

First, consider the importance of economic development and its employment outcomes in Latin America. A series of forces are currently shaping economies and employment across the region and thus are considered in our analysis. These include: 1) changing global markets and demand profiles; 2) deep economic crisis facing the region; 3) fiscal crisis for Latin American states and the need for foreign direct investment; and 4) transforming relations between Latin American states, labor, capital and the International Monetary Fund (hereafter IMF) and other private and public lenders and investors. These forces in combination are transforming industrial development all across Latin America by bringing new forms of industry, export-oriented development initiatives and new labor demands and forms of employment contracts (Gwynne 1985; Gilbert 1986; Gereffi 1990; Scarpaci 1990).

The geographic and social impacts of these dynamics, however, vary considerably from place to place. One important dimension of these place to place differences derives from variations in the relations between organized labor, the state and investors in export-oriented industries such as electronics, fashion garments

and so on. This is illustrated by examining these relations and geographic outcomes in Mexico, Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay. In Mexico, labor unions have traditionally been closely allied with the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional) such that the unions wield considerable power in the industrial sphere. The majority of unionized Mexican workers are affiliated with CTM (Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos) through which they organize and negotiate for work conditions and benefits. In Brazil by contrast, very different state-labor relations existed during recent decades. Twenty years of strong military rule and the related dominance of capital over labor has resulted in a weak and fragmented labor movement with minimal bargaining power vis-a-vis industry (Safa 1987; Portes 1983: 167). In Argentina and Uruguay, the state provided benefits to organized labor since the thirties. Here also a combination of repressive military regimes and deep economic crisis are now eroding union power and benefits during the eighties (Scarpaci 1990).

This has resulted in very different geographies of production in each country. The Mexican border region is a particular geographic and social solution to the state's need for capital, transnational industry's need for proximate and cheap labor, the supply of women in need of work in the context of high male unemployment and the strength of organized labor (Fernandez-Kelly 1983). A distinct zone was created, separated from the union-influenced industrial interior of Mexico. Here subcontracting between foreign and Mexican firms often employs non-unionized female workers in factories, something far less widespread in the Mexican interior due in part to the strength of CTM-PRI connections. In the Brazilian case, the state's need for foreign capital has also **[end p. 298]** resulted in export processing but it is far more integrated into formal factories throughout the domestic economy than in Mexico (Safa 1987; Haggard 1989). This reflects in part the weakness of the union movement and its inability to dictate work contracts and conditions to foreign investors. In the Southern Cone countries economic decline has also changed relations between the state, labor and capital with important geographical and social impacts. These countries have assumed a new position within the global division of labor with the establishment of Iquique free trade zone in Chile and with promotion of Montevideo as the "Singapore of South America" (Scarpaci 1990: 201). These adjustments have also had social impacts as Uruguay and Argentina have been forced to sell cheap labor for light assembly production. The latter has been coupled with an erosion of total manufacturing employment, wage levels, and benefits to workers (Scarpaci 1990: 200-202).

A second illustration of the mediation of broader forces *in places* is provided by examination of social infrastructure provision in Latin American cities. Provision of social infrastructure has been a crucial mechanism for maintaining social stability in recent years (Gilbert 1990). As with the previous example, this process has been shaped by forces operating at a variety of geographic scales with differing local impacts. These forces include: 1) international guidance and loans for establishing agencies and programs; 2) international debt and associated fiscal crisis for Latin American states that has juggled domestic spending priorities; and 3) massive urban expansion and increasing demand for urban services from a variety of social groups. These forces and their combination in specific Latin American cities reveals interconnections between global economic conditions, social infrastructure provision by the state and urban political dynamics.

Students come to see these interconnections through detailed case studies. Consider for example Gilbert's (1990) study of public service provision under debt crisis in Colombia. State agencies for public services were developed through their constructive relationships with international aid agencies. As the world wide recession took hold during the eighties, however, Colombian agency coffers rapidly emptied due to drastic increases in interest rates on foreign loans, overly ambitious projects and pork barrel allocation of construction contracts (Klak and Lawson 1990: 3). As a result, Colombian urban dwellers were asked to pay an increasing proportion of earnings for urban services, which in turn resulted in pirating and refusal to pay. These dynamics have disrupted relationships between international agencies, the state and urban residents.

Similar interconnections are illustrated in the operation of housing programs in Managua during the seventies. Here, however, urban residents at large were never the beneficiaries of a constructive relationship

between international agencies and the Somoza regime. Rather, this example illustrates the ways in which an urban elite group took control of aid for rebuilding in order to reinforce its own economic and political power. Following the earthquake in 1972, international aid flowed into Nicaragua and Higgins' (1990) study illustrates how the Somoza regime super-profited from these funds. Specifically, the Somocistas assembled a network of materials suppliers, construction firms, real estate brokers and land owners who monopolized the benefits of rebuilding Managua. Through this network, state housing agencies were able to transform international aid funds into a source of private capital for a particular social faction. In this example, low-income urban residents were most excluded in the rush to profit from international loans. Managua's housing deficit was not substantially reduced during the rebuilding phase, and much of the low-income housing did not reach its target population (Higgins 1990: 8; Chavez 1987). Accordingly, the Nicaraguan example provides a clear illustration of connections between social class, social welfare provision and political dynamics. The Sandinista revolution followed this period of control and corruption.

These two examples emphasize interconnections between economic forces, political dynamics and social class. In addition, students work through other examples which illustrate how gender and ethnicity also operate to mediate the outcomes of development policies and initiatives. For example, students learn about work force segmentation, a process by which women and minorities are restricted to particular jobs and remuneration levels inferior to those experienced by organized labor (Humphrey 1985; Safa 1987; Nash and Fernandez-Kelly 1983). Students also study grassroots urban social movements to gain an understanding of who is involved and what issues are raised by such groups. See, for example, research on urban invasions (Gilbert and Ward 1985; Castells 1982), writings on women's mobilization and action (Moser 1987; Jaquette 1989), and work on ecology and green movements (Escobar 1988: 11).

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TEACHING RESOURCES AND TECHNIQUES

While graduate and undergraduate courses are guided by similar goals, resources and techniques used differ. As noted previously, my undergraduate teaching has dual goals: 1) to provide a sense of the region through a variety of media; and 2) to provide an overview of development thought from advanced-economy and Latin American perspectives. A first step is to provide a base of information about the region generally not provided in their high school education. This involves developing a sense of broad commonalities in the cultural, historical, environmental and other key aspects of the region. It also requires developing a sense of difference between places within the region *and* between Latin America and North America. This is followed by an introduction to key themes in Western development theory. Students are exposed to writings on political, social and economic development and then are encouraged to critique this work using Latin American writings and perspectives garnered from place knowledge. A key theme I convey is that early development writing lacked a sense of how history and culture, gender, ethnic and racial differentiation influence the operation of, and people's experiences with, development processes.

Since a majority of students have had no experience of Latin America, images are provided through movies, guest speakers with slides, and newspapers. Examples of movies include: 1) *Controlling Interest* and *Seeds of Revolution*, which deal with the role of multinational corporations in enhancing or subverting development agendas in Latin America; 2) *Americas in Transition* and *Under the Gun: Democracy in Guatemala*, which examine Latin American democracy and its conflict with domestic and international power groups; and 3) *Portrait of Teresa* and *El Hombre, Cuando es Hombre* which deals with Latin American *machismo* and women's subordination.[(3)]

In addition, undergraduate students are encouraged to read *The Miami Herald, Wall Street Journal, The Christian Science Monitor* and Spanish language Latin American papers if they are able.

Through these means, students gain place knowledge and are simultaneously introduced to debates and controversy over development issues. This approach is deliberately issues-oriented and led, rather than theory led. Theory is introduced gradually, especially in lower level classes, as the students attempt to make sense of the issue and as they consider alternative solutions. Through these materials students learn the substance of key issues. In addition, they learn to recognize the credentials and biases of different authors and learn to think critically and analytically. Course requirements oblige students to write and to organize arguments using, for example, news analysis essays as one vehicle. Another is to assign something akin to *Global Issues.* This is an annual publication that draws articles on pressing issues from a variety of news media sources. These are presented in point-counterpoint format such that the students are exposed to a range of thought and argument.

Graduate teaching follows similar themes but with variations in content and approach. Graduate student training is more theoretical, broadly social scientific and critical in orientation. Graduate work emphasizes substantive areas neglected in much advanced-economy development work, including issues of gender, ethnicity and race. Understandings are built of why these topics have been neglected and of the implications of their inclusion. In addition, graduate students take a far more active role in class design, each leading a seminar session and providing an article of their choosing to complement the assigned reading. Seminars are discussion and debate oriented and are based on journal articles, recent books, movies, guest speakers and personal field experience. Materials employed are by authors drawn as far as possible from a variety of countries, ethnic groups, political orientations and from both men and women in order to illustrate common themes and different perspectives that illustrate the fluidity of development concepts and categories.

Both theoretical and more tangible issues are worked out through in-depth case studies of a particular country by each student. Course requirements then, are leadership in class discussions, critiques of selected articles read during the quarter and a paper elaborating the operation of certain processes in a particular empirical setting. The latter is again designed to teach students to confront the creative tension between broader theoretical process and place uniqueness.

Notes

1. The primary focus of my courses is on economic, social, and urban development (as opposed to cultural-ecological, physical and environmental dimensions). My focus comprises one component of a broader development studies program in our department, in which colleagues teach rural, political-ecological and environmental themes. Accordingly, my comments in this paper are limited to the areas that I teach.

2. This focus is not intended to deny the importance of physical and environmental differences between places; rather, it reflects my focus on economic and social development and an emphasis on urban development in my courses.

3. These movies are available through the Instructional Media Services at the University of Washington. The efforts of a multidisciplinary faculty in Latin American Studies has made these, and other movie resources, available.

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